



Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann

Press release – 25.07.2019

Psychological Society of Ireland welcomes Ministers acknowledgement to do more to help people in custody

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), the learned and professional body for psychology in the Republic of Ireland, welcomes the recent public commentary by Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan, in his acknowledgement that the State needs to do more to help people in custody with serious mental illness, including the provision of greater psychology resources.

The PSI acknowledges the significant achievements to date of the Irish Prison Service in implementing the 2015 recommendations of the 'New Connections' review by the internationally recognised leading expert in the field, Dr Frank Porporino. The PSI notes that Dr Porporino was unequivocal in stating that in order for Ireland to provide interventions in custody and achieve best possible community safety at least comparable to other Western Societies, a minimum ratio of 1 psychologist per 150 people in custody is required.

The PSI remains concerned that notwithstanding the best efforts of the Irish Prison Service, the ratio remains below that required to provide an adequate service. Differences in psychology and other mental health professional staffing across the prison estate and National Forensic Mental Health Service are contributory factors in the poor access to the right intervention at the right time at not just Cloverhill but also at other prisons where there are significant understaffing, such as Castlerea, from where the PSI is most concerned that often vulnerable and unwell people in custody have to be transferred typically after significant delay and of potential risk to themselves and those responsible for their safe transfer, in order to access psychiatric services.

The PSI calls upon Minister Flanagan to prioritise adequate funding in Budget 2020 of the Irish Prison Service to permit full implementation of Dr Porporino's 2015 recommendations.

Additionally, the PSI is heartened to note the Minister's acknowledgement of the need to action more health-led rather than criminal justice-led responses to those engaged in substance misuse. In other jurisdictions, such responses are already leading to evidenced social and economic benefits such as reductions in harm to self and others and simultaneous cost savings through reductions in incarceration rates.

The PSI is concerned however by media reports that the report of the expert group established to report on the possession of illegal drugs may not fully endorse a health-led response. The PSI understands Minister of State in the Department of Health, Minister Byrne, will shortly bring this report to Cabinet, followed by the publication of the report. The PSI will be better placed to comment on the published report at that juncture.

President of the PSI, Ian O'Grady, states: It is beyond any doubt that there is a significant cohort of vulnerable people in the custody of the state. All members of Irish society deserve

equitable access to evidence based psychological interventions. We urge the government to act without delay to implement fully the recommendations of the expert review and in particular to bring the number of Psychologists required up to recommended levels."

ENDS.

For media queries, or to arrange an interview with a PSI spokesperson, please contact:

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To note:

- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) is the learned and professional body for psychology in the Republic of Ireland. Established in 1970, the Society currently has almost 3,000 members;
- The PSI is committed to maintaining high standards of practice in psychology and also to exploring new and innovative ways of furthering psychology as an applied science.